

LEON WILSON CLARK
OPERA SERIES

SHEPHERD SCHOOL OPERA

and members of the

SHEPHERD SCHOOL CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

present

L'INCORONAZIONE DI POPPEA

Music by CLAUDIO MONTEVERDI

Libretto by GIOVANNI FRANCESCO BUSENELLO

Richard Bado, conductor

Debra Dickinson, stage director

Wortham Opera Theatre

November 3, 5, 7 and 9, 2010

Performance times:

November 3, 5 and 9 at 7:30 p.m.

November 7 at 2:00 p.m.

NATIONAL *Opera* WEEK

Celebrating *35* Years 1975-2010

THE SHEPHERD SCHOOL OF MUSIC RICE UNIVERSITY

L'incoronazione di Poppea

Music by Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643)

Libretto by Giovanni Francesco Busenello (1598-1659)

Premiere in 1643

CAST

(in order of vocal appearance)

<i>Fortune</i>	<i>Elisabeth Rosenberg</i>
<i>Virtue</i>	<i>Erin Johnson</i>
<i>Love</i>	<i>Abbey Curzon</i>
<i>Ottone, noble lord</i>	<i>Carlton Ford</i>
<i>First Soldier</i>	<i>Daniel Sherill</i>
<i>Second Soldier</i>	<i>Joseph Mishler</i>
<i>Poppea, mistress of Nero</i>	<i>Chelsea Morris</i>
<i>Nero, emperor of Rome</i>	<i>Brenton Ryan</i>
<i>Arnalta, confidant of Poppea</i>	<i>Tyson Miller</i>
<i>Ottavia, empress of Rome</i>	<i>Carolyn Sproule</i>
<i>Nurse, confidant of the Empress Ottavia</i>	<i>Lauren Iezzi</i>
<i>Seneca, philosopher</i>	<i>Christopher Besch</i>
<i>Valletto, page to Empress Ottavia</i>	<i>Geordie Alexander</i>
<i>Drusilla, lady of the court</i>	<i>Amy Owens</i>
<i>Liberto, captain of the guard</i>	<i>Shea Owens</i>
<i>Friends of Seneca</i>	<i>Joseph Eletto, Robert Lilly, Joseph Mishler, Samuel Schultz, Daniel Sherrill, Paul Wilt</i>
<i>Lucano, poet</i>	<i>Robert Lilly</i>
<i>Littore, officer</i>	<i>Samuel Schultz</i>
<i>Tribuni</i>	<i>Geordie Alexander, Joseph Mishler, Daniel Sherrill</i>
<i>Consoli</i>	<i>Joseph Eletto, Samuel Schultz, Paul Wilt</i>
<i>Venus</i>	<i>Maria Failla</i>

ORCHESTRA

Continuo

Richard Bado, harpsichord

Robert Brewer, harpsichord, portativ organ

Amalia Bandy, archlute, four-course guitar

Eva Lymenstull, baroque cello

Violin I

Jude Ziliak

Viola

Leah Kovach

Double Bass

Kevin Brown

Violin II

Rachel Sandman

Cello

Sophie Benn

On-Stage Trumpet

Patrick Corvington

Alexander Fioto

The performance is approximately 2 hours and 40 minutes with one intermission. Please turn off cell phones and other electronic devices.

Videotaping or other video or audio recording is strictly prohibited.

ARTISTIC STAFF

Conductor	Richard Bado
Stage Director	Debra Dickinson
Set Designer	Ryan McGettigan
Costume Supervisor	Barbara Dolney
Lighting Designer	Michael Clark
Wig and Makeup Designer/Supervisor	Vicki Jo Bailey
Musical Preparation	Grant Loehnig, Ellen Hargis, Rachel Chao
Properties Master	Alex Stutler
Italian Diction Coach	Corradina Caporello
Surtitles	Patricia Houk

PRODUCTION STAFF

Technical Director	Troy McLaughlin
Assistant Director/Stage Manager	Alex Stutler
Running Crew	Abigail Dock, Adam Lau, Stephen Ray, Erika Rodden, Erica Schoelkopf
Shepherd School Production Staff	Mandy Billings (Manager) Francis Schmidt, Ryan Retartha

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This production is made possible by a generous endowment from the late Dr. Leon Wilson Clark, and in part by financial support from The Humphreys Foundation.

Special thanks to Keeland Design Center, the Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture (University of Houston) and Houston Grand Opera Prop and Sound Departments.

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SHEPHERD SCHOOL OPERA DEPARTMENT AND VOICE DEPARTMENT

*Richard Bado, Professor of Opera Studies and
Director of the Opera Studies Program*
Stephen King, Professor of Voice and Chair of the Voice Department
Janet de Chambrier, Artist Teacher of Opera Studies
Debra Dickinson, Artist Teacher of Opera Studies for Acting and Movement
Susan Lorette Dunn, Lecturer in Voice
*Thomas Jaber, Professor of Music, Director of
Choral Activities, and Vocal Coach*
Kathleen Kaun, Professor of Voice
Grant Loehnig, Artist Teacher of Opera Studies
Susanne Mentzer, Professor of Voice
Rachel Chao, Staff Pianist
Karen Reeves, Opera Program Administrator
Troy McLaughlin, Technical Director
Alex Stutler, Assistant Director and Stage Manager
Barbara Dolney, Costume Supervisor

SYNOPSIS

Prologue

The Goddesses Virtue and Fortune vie for supremacy over the world. The god Love asserts his authority over them and promises that within the day, he will show how love can conquer all.

Act I

Just before dawn, Ottone returns to Rome from service abroad to the house of his beloved Poppea, only to find that her door is being guarded by Nero's sleeping soldiers. Realizing that he has been supplanted in her affections by the Emperor, he accidentally awakens the guards with his laments. They complain that the Emperor has been neglecting his duties to the Empire and his wife Ottavia while pursuing his mistress. Nero and Poppea enter, fresh from a night of lovemaking. She exacts a partial promise from him that he will repudiate his wife and get a divorce. After he leaves, Poppea calls upon Love and Fortune to help her attain her goal of becoming empress. Her confidant, Arnalta, is fearful of the dangers involved in aiming for so high a position, but Poppea brushes aside her concerns.

At the palace, the Empress Ottavia is humiliated by her husband's neglect and threatened by the impending divorce. Seneca, Nero's longtime tutor and chief advisor, tells her to bear her grief stoically. She asks him to go to the people of Rome and the Senate with her grievances against her husband. Seneca contemplates the hidden sorrows of the rich and powerful, and Nero comes in to announce that he is going to divorce Ottavia. Seneca tries to reason with him, but Nero loses his temper and declares that power and force give a ruler the right to do whatever he pleases. Poppea appears to calm Nero and suggests to him that Seneca should be killed. Nero agrees at once.

Ottone confronts Poppea, trying to win her back, but she announces that she now belongs to Nero. Crushed by the rejection, Ottone realizes that his life is in danger, and that the ambitious Poppea will not stop at having him killed. He resolves to kill her before she gets the chance and he enlists the aid of his former girlfriend Drusilla, one of the Empress' ladies. She is still in love with Ottone and is very happy that his affections seem to have turned again in her direction. But even as Ottone tries to make himself believe that he can be happy with Drusilla, he wavers in his resolve to kill Poppea, remembering his great love.

Seneca returns to his country villa and contemplates the peaceful life away from the trials of court. A messenger of the Emperor arrives with orders from Nero that Seneca is to take his own life. Seneca gladly complies, saying a final stoic farewell to his family and friends.

Act II

The poet laureate of Rome, Seneca's nephew Lucano, is summoned before Nero to celebrate the death of his uncle by singing the praises of Poppea. Ottavia, desperate to maintain her position, orders Ottone to kill Poppea, threatening torture and death if he refuses. He asks his trusted Drusilla to help disguise him in her clothes, and she eagerly becomes an accomplice to the murder. As Poppea and Arnalta nap in the garden, Ottone stealthily draws a weapon on Poppea, but the god Love steps in to save her at the last minute. Ottone slinks away, but is seen by Poppea and Arnalta, who mistakenly believe the assassin is Drusilla.

Nero's soldiers capture Drusilla, who confesses to the crime in order to save Ottone. Nero is about to torture Drusilla to learn who her accomplice was, and Ottone steps forward to accept the blame, implicating Ottavia in his confession. Nero, pleased that he finally has valid grounds to divorce his wife, exiles Ottone and orders that Empress Ottavia be put out to sea in a boat, and left to die. When Nero breaks the good news to Poppea, she is thrilled to realize that her long awaited goal of becoming Empress is now at hand. Arnalta, too, exults in her upwardly mobile social status. No longer Empress, Ottavia bids Rome a final farewell as she is exiled. Nero crowns Poppea and Love asks his mother, Venus, to make Poppea a goddess. Poppea and Nero sing a final love duet together as the opera ends.

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

"What an artist dies in me!" – The Emperor Nero's last words before he was forced to commit suicide, thereby ending a bloody and tyrannical reign.

Composed in 1642, *L'incoronazione di Poppea* was the first opera to be written about actual historical figures and events. Monteverdi strongly believed that music should be text and drama-driven and should serve to present the human condition and sensibility. Though ancient Rome is historically remote from us, we can recognize themes and psychological characteristics, motivations and behaviors from our own time. The opera uses a seamless blend of words and music to present immoral characters rife with excesses of greed, lust and ambition. The composer's use of irony and the insights it illuminates can be much more deeply appreciated and understood with a closer examination of the history upon which the opera is based. The timeline of the events was altered by Monteverdi and librettist Busenello so that the plot could occur within the span of twenty-four hours, as per Aristotle's *Poetics*, but the historical essence is intact.

Though these days the infamous Emperor Nero is best known for fiddling while Rome burned, the actual history behind his reign is a fascinating look at the decadence and brutality of ancient Rome. Nero was born in 37 AD, and his mother Agrippina managed to become empress of Rome by marrying her own uncle, the Emperor Claudius. Claudius had a daughter from a previous marriage, Octavia (the Ottavia of our story). Agrippina convinced the elderly Claudius to marry Octavia to Nero, to unite the Julian and Claudian blood lines, and then further persuaded him to name Nero as his heir. As soon as this agreement was reached, Agrippina poisoned her husband, and Nero ascended to the throne at the age of sixteen. His tutor, stoic philosopher Seneca, became one of his chief advisors, and the first five years of Nero's reign were peaceful and uneventful.

However, as Nero got older, he chafed against his mother's dominance (she is said to have used incest as a way to control her son) and in 59 AD, he sent her out to sea in a boat that was rigged to be shipwrecked, much as he does to Ottavia in the opera. Agrippina managed to survive the shipwreck, so Nero had his guards club her to death. He was tormented by nightmares of this crime throughout his life. After Poppea, who was married to Nero's good friend Otho (Ottone in the opera), caught Nero's eye, he manufactured an excuse to send Otho off to war to facilitate the affair. In 62 AD, Nero divorced Octavia and exiled her in order to marry Poppea. The public protested vehemently and Nero was forced to recall her, but he had her executed shortly after her return. Having fallen from power due to Nero's increasing independence and brutality, Seneca and his nephew, poet laureate Lucano, who is also in the opera, were accused of conspiring in a plot to overthrow Nero and were ordered to kill themselves. In 64 AD, the Great Fire of Rome was rumored to be started by Nero because he subsequently took advantage of the available real estate to build himself a huge golden palace in the center of the city. In order to deflect the blame for this, Nero used the fledgling Christian sect as a scapegoat, and ordered hundreds of Christians tortured and killed in retaliation, including disciples Peter and Paul. Nero was obsessed with Greek culture and imagined himself to be a great poet, singer and actor, often neglecting his duties while indulging in scandalous public performances. Poppea did not long enjoy the fruits of being empress; in 65 AD, when she was pregnant with her second child, Nero, in a fit of rage, kicked her to death. Nero's reign ended three years later when he was declared an enemy of the people by the senate, and forced to commit suicide.

BIOGRAPHIES

A native of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, **RICHARD BADO** (Conductor) made his professional conducting debut in 1989 leading Houston Grand Opera's acclaimed production of **Show Boat** at the newly restored Cairo Opera House in Egypt. Since then, Mr. Bado has conducted at Teatro alla Scala, Opéra National de Paris, Houston Grand Opera, New York City Opera, the Aspen Music Festival, the Tulsa Opera, the Russian National Orchestra, the Florida Philharmonic, the Montreal Symphony, Wolf Trap Opera, and Houston Ballet, and has conducted the Robert Wilson production of Virgil Thomson's **Four Saints in Three Acts** at the Edinburgh Festival. He has appeared regularly in recital with Renée Fleming and has also accompanied Cecilia Bartoli, Frederica von Stade, Denyce Graves, Susan Graham, Marcello Giordani, Ramón Vargas, Samuel Ramey, and Nathan Gunn. Mr. Bado, who holds music degrees from the Eastman School of Music, where he received the 2000 Alumni Achievement Award, and from West Virginia University, has studied advanced choral conducting with Robert Shaw. Mr. Bado has served as Houston Grand Opera's Chorus Master since 1988. This season marks Mr. Bado's sixth year as Director of the Opera Studies Program at Rice University's Shepherd School of Music. He has been on the faculty of the Aspen Music Festival and School, the International Vocal School in Moscow, and has served on the music staff of the Metropolitan Opera, Seattle Opera, Opera Australia, Opera Theater of St. Louis, Chautauqua Opera, and Wolf Trap Opera. Mr. Bado regularly judges for the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions and served as Houston Grand Opera's Head of Music Staff for fourteen seasons.

DEBRA DICKINSON (Stage Director) has directed productions of *A Little Night Music*, *Viva la mamma!*, *The Prologue from Ariadne auf Naxos*, *Gianni Schicchi*, *L'elisir d'amore*, *Rinaldo*, *Street Scene*, *La finta giardiniera*, *La Calisto*, *Hansel and Gretel*, *The Turn of the Screw*, *Werther*, *Albert Herring*, *Così fan tutte*, *Le nozze di Figaro*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at The Shepherd School of Music. Other opera directing credits include *Die Fledermaus* at Florida State University, *Trouble in Tahiti* for the apprentice program of the Connecticut Opera, and *The Tender Land* at the Montaux Opera Festival. Ms. Dickinson was the assistant director of *Naughty Marietta* and *The Pajama Game* at the New York City Opera under Beverly Sills. This summer, she will be directing and teaching for the Young Artists Program at the Glimmerglass Festival. A member of Actor's Equity Association, Ms. Dickinson's performing credits include Guenevere in *Camelot* opposite both Richard Burton and Richard Harris, and Jellylorum in *Cats* at Theater an der Wien in Vienna. Ms. Dickinson teaches the Opera Workshop classes at The Shepherd School of Music.

RYAN MCGETTIGAN's (Set Designer) recent opera credits include *La Traviata* with Granite State Opera, *Die Fledermaus* with Opera Providence, *Der Rosenkavalier* with Lowell House Opera, and *Summer and Smoke* with the New England Conservatory. Last spring Mr. McGettigan designed the set for the Shepherd School's production of *A Little Night Music*. Theatre credits include Cape Cod Repertory, New Hampshire's Barnstormers Theatre, Boston's Centastage, Nora Theatre, New Repertory Theatre companies, and Atlanta's Legacy Theatre. In television, Mr. McGettigan designed The 26th Annual EVVY Awards. His upcoming productions will be *The Drowsy Chaperone* for Cape Cod Repertory Theatre, *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever* for Boston's Stoneham Theatre, *The Marvelous Wonderettes*, and *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* at Atlanta's Legacy Theatre.

— BIOGRAPHIES CONTINUED ON INSERTED PAGE —



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